

Tuesday's Service Champion is the Georgia Department of Public Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is not only responsible for providing services to the public to prevent disease, injury, and disability, but also for promoting the well-being of the citizens of Georgia. It is one of the primary State agencies that prepares for and responds to disasters. But what about caring for its own employees?

DPH was recently identified as a model agency for its outstanding overall performance in the FY2016 Human Resources (HR) Audit and, in particular, its exceptional leave management program. Lee Rudd, HR Director, says a well-run leave management system assists and benefits employees who may be going through health issues, require time away from family for military duty, or are dealing with calamity in their lives. The State has a robust leave program to support work/life balance, providing a variety of paid and unpaid benefits that attract people to public service. The assortment of leave options with their various nuances can be a challenge to manage. Mr. Rudd explains that a good program to support leave management starts with sound internal policies based on State Personnel Board (SPB) Rules. DPH's policies are regularly updated to keep them compliant with current laws to ensure management and supervisors have what they need to administer leave. A well-structured leave management program makes it simple for employees to request and use leave appropriately. Such easy access to benefits can help build morale and engagement.

Mr. Rudd asserts that the working relationship and guidance provided by his HR staff to DPH employees and to the 18 public health district offices are critical for a smooth operation. Some of the innovative ways they support leave management include:

- Providing a "Readers Digest" version of "Need to Know" leave guidelines and policies to field HR staff, District Directors, and supervisors. Covered topics include: Family and Medical Leave (FMLA), Education Support Leave, military leave, annual and sick leave, voting leave, court leave, and emergency closure;
- Regular on-going email communication to Health District HR professionals on updates to its policies and processes.
- Quarterly meeting with Health District HR professionals to discuss HR best practices in leave management;
- Host "Two for Tuesdays Lunch and Learn" meetings for Atlanta area staff every 2 weeks to discuss DPH Programs and HR topics; and,
- Conduct an annual informal audit of major areas of HR where HR team members audit their teammates work.

Other practices that DPH follows to support FMLA compliance include:

- HR staff members that oversee the FMLA process are provided training when they begin the role and refresher courses every two years.
- To protect the employee, absences that are eligible for FMLA are designated as such, regardless of whether the employee requests such designation.

- If an employee is not provided FMLA and should have been, then DPH retroactively designates it, as long as doing so is not detrimental to the employee, or when both the supervisor and employee mutually agree to the designation.
- When processing FMLA requests, HR sends a letter to the employee explaining leave requirements, deadlines, and attaches policies and required paperwork.
- When FMLA is exhausted, and the employee no longer has any leave available, DPH reviews the situation and determines if additional leave, or other reasonable accommodation, would be an appropriate option. HR then works with the employee to come up with an effective solution.

Mr. Rudd attributes DPH's success in leave management to DPH's great HR team members who are "smart, detailed, customer-oriented, and responsive to employees." He also emphasizes the importance of having defined policies and procedures along with the tools such as template letters, job aids, and online training to make the leave management process work for the supervisor and the employee.